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Advancing American Innovation and Competitiveness

Chairman John D. (Jay) Rockefeller IV

U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation

WASHINGTON, D.C.—We are here today to talk about science: science for research, research for innovation, the innovation behind new technologies, and technology development that leads to high-tech jobs.

Science-based innovation drives enormous economic growth and helps America compete in the global economy.

For centuries, innovation has made this country a global economic leader, from the steam engine driving the Industrial Revolution to computers and networks powering the Internet Revolution.

But we cannot take that leadership for granted and we need to redouble our efforts to make sure we never lose ground.

At a time when the economy continues to struggle, our future depends on the investments we make today to keep our nation competitive and ensure our communities' long-term economic security and prosperity.

Five years ago, the National Academies report "Rising Above the Gathering Storm" sounded the alarm that U.S. leadership in science and technology was eroding.

And so Congress responded in 2007 with the America COMPETES Act—landmark legislation to increase national investment in research and development, as well as science, technology, engineering, and math education—popularly known as STEM education.

Now the legislation is set to expire this year and, as we look toward reauthorization, we need to evaluate our progress since the law was passed.

President Obama began his presidency with a call to "restore science to its rightful place."

He has followed through on that promise with proposed funding increases in science, technology, innovation, and STEM education.

And we also made a significant investment with last year's Recovery Act.

Research institutions across the country have received the kind of grants and awards that will allow them to jumpstart new projects and hire new employees.

I know West Virginia colleges and universities have already received nearly $29 million to continue their important work.

But we have much more to do and we need to look even further down the road at the same time.

And in this difficult budgetary climate, I agree with the president's focus on research and investments in STEM education.

We may not see the immediate pay-off from these budget increases, but the long-term dividends will be immeasurable.

A world-class STEM workforce is fundamental to addressing the challenges of the 21st century—from developing clean sources of energy that reduce our dependence on foreign oil to discovering cures for diseases.

And very importantly—that means quality jobs, too.

Projections from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) indicate that over 80 percent of the fastest-growing occupations depend on knowledge of mathematics and science.

We simply cannot afford to continue jeopardizing our nation's future by failing to invest today.

This hearing is an opportunity to examine how and where we are making those investments as we consider the path ahead and what more needs to be done.

And I am pleased to say that I don't think we could have a better qualified group here today to answer those questions.

Dr. Holdren, President Obama's Science Advisor, is responsible for the broad federal science enterprise as the Director of the Office of Science and Technology Policy.

Dr. Bement is the Director of the National Science Foundation (NSF), the primary source of Federal funding for the nation's universities for engineering and the physical sciences.

Dr. Bement knows I have been a longtime champion of The Experimental Program to Stimulate Competitive Research (EPSCoR), which is part of NSF's vital work to assist smaller states competing for research grants.

Dr. Gallagher is the Director of the National Institute of Standards and Technology or NIST, which is a small but absolutely critical agency just up the road in Gaithersburg conducting cutting-edge measurement research for new technologies.

Finally, we have Dr. Braun, who has recently been named as NASA's Chief Technologist. NASA

research has led to the commercialization of products and services that have benefitted our economy and society in profound ways.

I want to thank you all for being here today and I look forward to your testimony.

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